DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 377 254 UD 029 595

AUTHOR Putman, Diana Briton; Noor, Mohamood Cabdi
TITLE The Somalis: Their History and Culture. CAL Refugee Fact Sheet Series, No. 9.
INSTITUTION Center for Applied Linguistics, Washington, DC. Refugee Service Center.
SPONS AGENCY Department of State, Washington, DC. Bureau of Refugee Programs.
PUB DATE Oct 93
NOTE 41p.
AVAILABLE FROM Refugee Service Center, Center for Applied Linguistics, 1118 22nd Street, N.W., Washington, DC 20037.
PUB TYPE Historical Materials (060) -- Reports - Descriptive (141)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Acculturation; Adjustment (to Environment); *African Culture; African History; Cultural Differences; *Educational Background; Educational Opportunities; Elementary Secondary Education; *Immigrants; *Islamic Culture; *Multicultural Education; *Refugees; Religious Cultural Groups; Sex Role; Social Problems; War
IDENTIFIERS *Somalia; Somali Americans; Somalis

ABSTRACT

This booklet is a basic introduction to the people, history, and culture of Somalia. It is designed primarily for service providers and others assisting Somali refugees in their new communities in the United States. Somalis have a long tradition of going abroad to work or study, and today, about 1 million Somalis live scattered around the world. The first Somalis came to the United States in the 1920s, and their numbers increased gradually, with a greater increase in the number of refugees in the 1980s, and a larger number arriving in 1990 as a result of the Somali Civil War. The discussion traces the history of the nation and comments on its land and social structure, as well as gender roles and culture. Before the Colonial Era, Koranic schools provided traditional Islamic education in Somalia. Western-style education came in the Colonial Era, with British and Italian influences predominating. Somali did not exist in a written form until 1972, and Somali than became the language of government and education. Civil war has destroyed much of the educational system, and much of the educational elite has left the country. Many cultural values are similar to American values, but others differ sufficiently that awareness of these differences is a necessity for those working with Somalis in the United States. Information is presented on Somali names and characteristics, and a glossary of common Somali terms is included. (Contains 28 references.) (SLD)

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THE SOMALIS

THEIR HISTORY AND

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CAL Refugee Fact Sheet #9

The Somalis
Their History and Culture

Diana Briton Putman & Mohamood Cabdi Noor

Published by
The Refugee Service Center
Center for Applied Linguistics
1118 22nd Street NW
Washington DC 20037
(202) 429-9292

October 1993

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Cover: The town of Maydh, on the coast of the Gulf of Aden. Photo by Abby Thomas
Cover design by Vincent Sagart
Interior design and production by Sonia Kundert

Preface

This booklet is a basic introduction to the people, history, and culture of Somalia. It is designed primarily for service providers and others assisting Somali refugees in their new communities in the United States.

The principal writers are Dr. Diana Briton Putman and Dr. Mohamood Cabdi Noor. Dr. Putman, a foreign service officer for the United States Agency for International Development, conducted doctoral research in the Baay Region of Somalia and also worked on various development projects between 1980 and 1983. Dr. Noor, a refugee from Somalia, works at the World Bank. He served at Somali National University as Vice President and as Dean of the College of Agriculture. He also served in the Somali government as Vice Minister for Agriculture. The opinions expressed in this booklet are those of the authors only, and do not represent USAID or World Bank official views or policy.

The section on the Somali language was written by Dr. David Zorc, a senior linguist at MRM, Inc., and Madina Osman, a Somali language consultant. Dr. Zorc and Ms. Osman are co-authors of a Somali-English dictionary.

Many people read and commented on drafts of the manuscript. In particular, we would like to thank: Dr. Ali Jimale Ahmed, Professor of Comparative Literature at Queens College and the Graduate Center, City University of New York; Dr. Charles Geshekter, Professor of African History at California State University, Chico; Dora Johnson, Program Associate at the Center for Applied Linguistics; Warren and Patricia Putman, who worked in Somalia for three years and know the people and culture well; William Sage, International Liaison for the Immigration and Refugee Program of Church World Service; Abby Thomas, who worked as a Peace Corps volunteer and development anthropologist in Somalia and is currently a PhD candidate at The American University; Elizabeth D. Thompson, Program Officer for African Admissions, Bureau for Refugee Programs, U.S. Department of State; and Nancy F. Weaver, Refugee Resettlement Caseworker at Lutheran Refugee and Immigration Services in Mechanicsburg, Pennsylvania. We would also like to acknowledge Sarah Neal of the Center for Applied Linguistics for her valuable copyediting and proofreading assistance.

Finally, we would like to thank the Bureau for Refugee Programs, U.S. Department of State, whose support made this guide possible.

Donald A. Ranard, Editor

Contents

Introduction 1
The Somali People 1
The Land 2
The Economy 4
History 5
- Colonial Occupation 6
- Independence 7
- The Revolutionary Regime 8
- Opposition to Siyaad Barre 10
- Civil War 11

Social Structure and Gender Roles 13
Language and Literacy 15
Education 16
Knowledge of English 17
Values 17
Religion 18
Art, Poetry, and Song 18
Food and Dress 19
Festivities 21
Names 22
- Cushitic Names 23
- Arabic Names 23

The Somali Language 24
- The Sound System and Pronunciation 24
- The Grammatical System 25
- The Importance of Proverbs 27
- The Writing System 27

Some Basic Somali Expressions 28
Some Basic Somali Vocabulary 28
The Somali Sounds 29
Glossary 30
Bibliography 32
- Somali Language Resources 34

Introduction

Somalis have a long tradition of going abroad to travel, work, or study. As one historian has noted, "[T]he Somali who goes striding through the bush with his camels and armed with a spear may know the slang of British sailors, or the jargon of Chicago, and play an excellent game of football."

Today, about 1 million Somalis live scattered around the world. While the great majority are refugees living in neighboring countries in East Africa and in the Middle East, there are Somali communities throughout Europe and North America. The largest is in Toronto, Canada, where more than 10,000 Somalis have settled in recent years.

The first Somali immigrants came to the United States in the 1920s and settled in the New York area.

The first Somali immigrants came to the United States in the 1920s and settled in the New York area. Most were sailors, although some worked in steel mills, and most came from northern Somalia. These early immigrants became naturalized Americans. They contributed greatly to the Somali independence movement, especially by assisting its leaders when they came to the United Nations. After Somalia gained independence in 1960, some of these immigrants were decorated with medals, while others were given land in Somalia.

In the 1960s, Somali students began coming to the United States, mostly on U.S. government or U.N. scholarships or through the support of relatives who were living in the United States. Many returned home after their studies and contributed greatly to the development of their country.

In the mid-1980s, small numbers of Somalis were admitted to the United States as refugees. In 1990, as a result of the civil war, their numbers increased. These refugees live in different parts of the United States, with larger concentrations in New York, Washington, D.C., Boston, Los Angeles, San Diego, Atlanta, and Detroit.

The Somali People

Before the civil war, the population of Somalia was estimated at 7.7 million people. It is believed that about 400,000 people died of famine or disease or were killed in the war, and nearly 45% of the population was displaced inside Somalia or fled to neighboring countries, to the Middle East, or to the West.

Somalia's population is mostly rural. Nearly 80% of the people are pastoralists, agriculturalists, or agropastoralists. Except for a small number of Somalis who rely on fishing, the rest of the

population are urban dwellers. Somalia's chief cities and towns are Mogadishu* (the capital), Hargeisa, Burao, Berbera, Bossaso, Marka, Brava, Baidoa, and Kismaayo. In the past few years, civil war and famine have changed urban demographics, as hundreds of thousands of displaced Somalis have poured into the cities seeking sanctuary and relief.

Ethnically and culturally, Somalia is one of the most homogeneous countries in Africa. Somalia has its minorities: There are people of Bantu descent living in farming villages in the south, and Arab enclaves in the coastal cities. A small number of Europeans, mostly Italians, live on farms in the south. But the great majority of the people are ethnic Somalis who speak dialects of the same language, Somali, and who practice the same religion, Islam. In a land of sparse rainfall, more than half the population are pastoralists or agropastoralists who raise camels, cattle, sheep, and goats. There are farmers, mostly in the south and northwest, and in recent years a new urban group of government workers, shopkeepers, and traders has emerged, but it is the nomadic way of life, with its love of freedom and open spaces, that is celebrated in Somali poetry and folklore.

Clans constitute the heart of Somali society, and the central challenge facing modern Somalia is how to unify a country whose people often give greater allegiance to lineage than to nation.

Clans constitute the heart of Somali society, and the central challenge facing modern Somalia is how to unify a country whose people often give greater allegiance to lineage than to nation. It is important to note, however, that while Somalis have traditionally fought among themselves, their greater identity as Somalis takes hold in front of strangers.

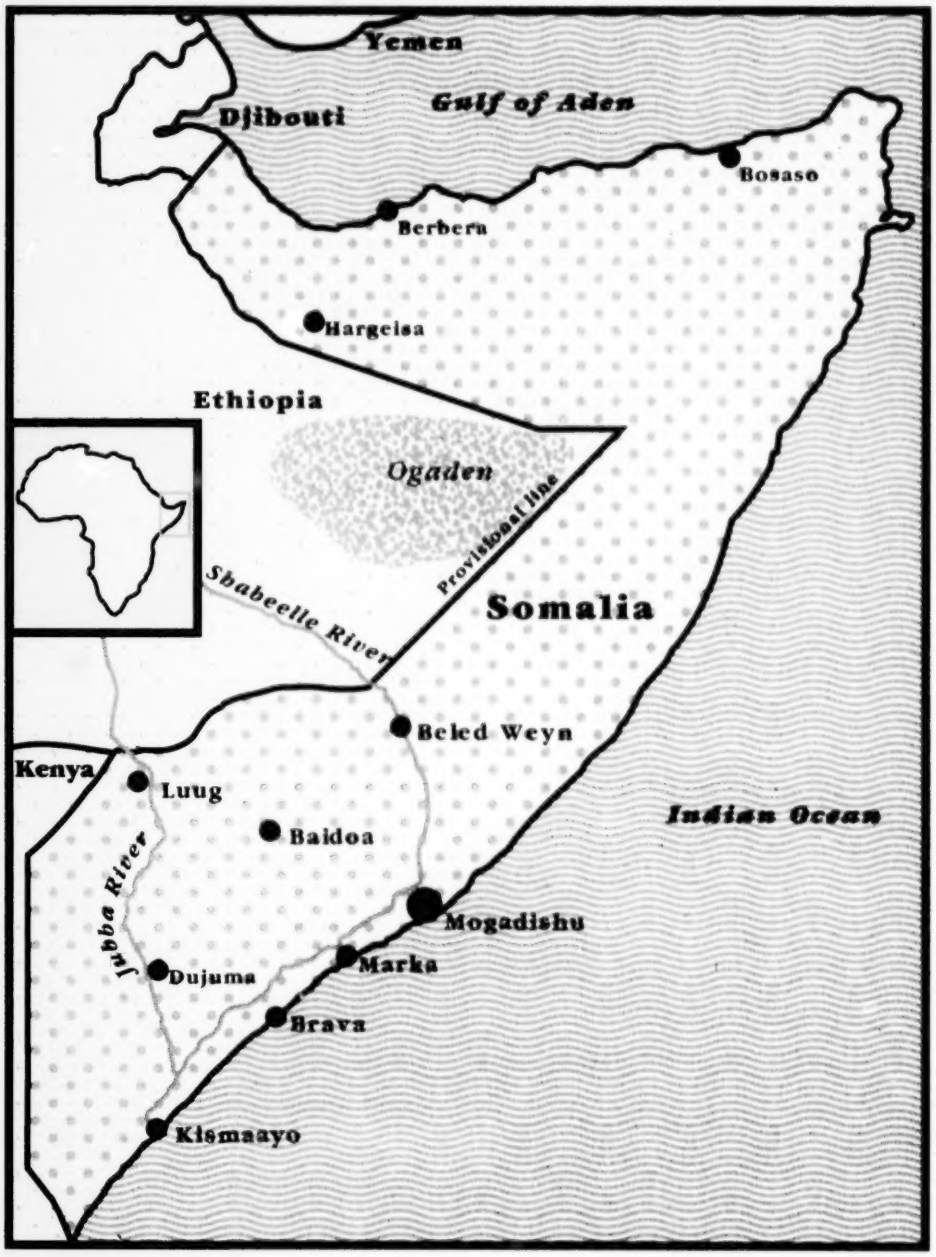
The Land

Situated in eastern Africa, Somalia forms the cap of the Horn of Africa. Bordered by Kenya in the south, Ethiopia in the west, Djibouti in the northwest, the Gulf of Aden in the north, and the Indian Ocean in the east, Somalia covers an area of about 638,000 square kilometers, making it slightly smaller than Texas. Somalia is mostly flat, rising in the southern and central regions to a few hundred meters above sea level near the Ethiopian border. The higher area is along the northern coast, where mountains rise to

*We apologize to Somalis who may object to seeing Anglicized spelling of Somali words. The official Somali orthography uses letters of the Latin alphabet, but in a manner which departs from the orthographic conventions of English. We have used Anglicized spellings for proper names for the sake of the reader who would not recognize *Muqdisha, Cali,* and *Maxammed* as Somali renderings of Mogadishu, Ali, and Mohammed.

some 2,000 meters. Somalia's long coastline—about 3,300 kilometers, the longest in Africa—has been vital to its trade with the Middle East and the rest of East Africa.

Climate is the primary factor in much of Somali life. With hot, dry weather year-round, except at the higher elevations in the north, most of Somalia has a semi-arid to arid environment suitable primarily for the nomadic pastoralism that more than half the



population practices. Agriculture is practiced primarily in the northwest and in the interriverine areas in the south.

Somalia has two rainy seasons: the *Gu* (April to June) and the *Dayr* (October to November). Droughts usually occur every two to three years in the *Dayr* and every eight to ten years in both the *Dayr* and the *Gu*. The coastal region in the south around Mogadishu and Kismaayo has an additional rainy season, the *Xagaaye* (July to August), in which isolated rain showers prevail.

In the south, the mean monthly temperature ranges from 68° F to 92° F. The hottest months are February through April. Somalia's hottest climate is on the northern coastal strip along the Gulf of Aden, where temperatures range from 105° F in the summer to 78° F in the winter. In the northern mountain regions, the climate is moderate, with temperatures ranging between 63° F in the winter to 78° F in the summer.

With hot, dry weather all year around, except at the higher elevations in the north, most of Somalia has a semi-arid to arid environment suitable primarily for the nomadic pastoralism that more than half the population practices.

Somalia has only two perennial rivers, the Jubba and the Shabeelle. Originating in the Ethiopian highlands, the rivers flow in a generally southerly direction. The Shabeelle, the longer of the two, is about 1,800 kilometers, of which 1,000 kilometers are in Somalia. The Shabeelle enters Somalia near the southern border town of Beled Weyn and flows toward the coast until it nears Mogadishu, where it turns parallel to the coast and flows southwest before ending in a series of swamp basins that serve as wildlife habitat. In years of high flow, the Shabeelle merges with the Jubba River and provides water for the most developed and productive irrigated agriculture in the country.

The Jubba River enters Somalia near the southern town of Luuq and flows for 800 kilometers to the coast. It follows a narrow rock stream up to Dujuma, where it meanders in a rich flood plain before flowing to the Indian Ocean.

The Economy

Somalia's economy is mostly agricultural, based primarily on livestock and secondarily on crops. In 1990, for example, agriculture contributed about 65% of the GDP (gross domestic product), of which livestock was responsible for just over 50%, crops 38%, and forestry and fisheries for about 1% each.

Prior to the recent strife, about 60% of the population in Somalia were pastoralists or agropastoralists, and about 20% were agriculturalists. Except for a small number of Somalis who rely on fishing, the remainder of the population were urban dwell-

ers, employed as government workers, shopkeepers, factory workers, and traders.

Pastoralists raise camels, cattle, sheep, and goats. Camels, especially valued for their ability to survive in an environment of scarce water and grazing, provide milk, meat, transportation of goods, and serve as a medium of exchange. Camels are a measure of wealth and status among all rural Somalis and among urbanites, who leave their herds with rural relatives.

Agropastoralists, found primarily in the interriverine areas, rely on a mixture of herding and farming. They usually have a permanent home in addition to their portable huts. The principal food crops, grown by small-scale farmers, are sorghum, corn, sesame, cowpeas, sugar cane, and rice. Commercial crops are bananas, citrus (mainly grapefruit and lemons), vegetables, cotton, frankincense, and myrrh.

Among ancient Egyptians, Somalia was known as the Land of Punt, renowned for its frankincense and myrrh, which it still exports.

History

Somalis claim descent from Arabian families who settled on the Somali coast 1,000 years ago. Although there undoubtedly is an infusion of Arab blood among Somalis, historians and linguists trace the origins of the Somali people to a much earlier time in the region.

While scholars still debate the origins of the Somalis and the time of their entry into present-day Somalia, there is no doubt that they were in the region several hundred years before the first recorded use of their names in the early 15th century. Among ancient Egyptians, Somalia was known as the Land of Punt and was renowned for its frankincense and myrrh, which it still exports. Descriptions of the northern inhabitants of the region are found in *The Periplus of the Erythrean Sea*, an A.D. 60 Greek guide to sailors, and in Ptolemy's *Geography*, compiled between the 2nd and 5th centuries; contact with Egyptian, Phoenician, Persian, Greek, and Roman traders dates to this time. In the 10th century, Chinese merchants returned home from Somalia with giraffes, leopards, and tortoises for the imperial menagerie. By this time, Arab and Persian merchants had established towns along the coasts of the northern plains and the Indian Ocean.

By the 12th century, the ancestors of some clan families were established in their present territories. Southward movements of others, however, continued into the 19th century. When the borders of present-day Somalia were set by the colonial powers

toward the end of the 19th century, large numbers of Somalis were left out, and today there are an estimated three million Somalis living in eastern Ethiopia and northern Kenya. The existence of Somalis outside the country's national borders continues to be a source of conflict in the region.

The process of Somali conversion to Islam in the north began very early, probably in the 11th and 12th centuries. From the 13th to 16th centuries, Somalis fought in regional wars between Christians and Muslims. In the 16th century, Somali clans participated in campaigns against Ethiopia, then called Abyssinia, led by Ahmed ibn Ibrahim al Ghazi, who was called Ahmed Gran—the Left Handed.

Toward the end of the 19th century, Somalia took part in a general Moslem reaction in North Africa against colonialism.

Colonial Occupation

The opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 stimulated European expansion into the region. By the end of the century, Somali people were living under the rule of four foreign powers: the British (in north central Somalia and in northeast Kenya), the Italians (in southern Somalia), the French (in the northwest, in what is now Djibouti), and the Ethiopians (in the Ogaden region). A Somali poet, Farrah Nuur, had this to say about Somalia's dismemberment:

> The British, the Ethiopians, and the Italians are squabbling,
> the country is snatched and divided by whosoever is stronger.
> The country is sold piece by piece without our knowledge.
> And for me, all this is the Teeth of the Last Days!

Toward the end of the 19th century, Somalia took part in a general Muslim reaction in North Africa against colonialism. In 1899, Mohammed ibn Abdullah Hassan, called the "Mad Mullah" by the British and known as "the Sayyid" by Somalis, launched a 20-year insurrection against colonial occupation. His movement controlled a large part of inland British Somaliland and initially enjoyed strong support among Somalis in the Ogaden and Italian Somalia. The Sayyid's abilities as a poet and orator, highly valued skills among Somalis, won him many disciples, and much of his success was in commanding trans-clan loyalty. Although ultimately he failed to maintain unity, the Sayyid is nonetheless viewed as one of the founders of Somali national identity.

The impact of colonialism on Somalia's economy was limited. To the colonial powers, Somalia's value was more strategic than economic. Only the Italians attempted a program of eco-

nomic development; their banana and sugarcane plantations in the south became the basis for large-scale commercial agriculture. In contrast, the British mainly used their colony as a supplier of meat products to Aden.

One economic effect of colonialism was the creation of a group of salaried employees. Somalis educated in colonial schools worked for the colonial government as police officers, custom agents, bookkeepers, medical personnel, and teachers. In later years, this group played an important role in the independence movement.

The rivalry between Allied and Axis powers in Europe in the 1930s and 1940s played out in the Horn of Africa. Early in 1940, Italy invaded British Somaliland and threw out the British. A year later the British retook the protectorate, conquering Italian Somalia and the Ogaden as well, and placed all three under British administration. Britain administered the entire area for nearly a decade. This period witnessed a growing national awareness, as more and more Somalis questioned the legitimacy of colonial rule and called for political unity.

On July 1, 1960, former British and Italian Somalia merged to form the Somali Republic.

Independence

British control of Italian Somalia ended in November 1949, when the area became a U.N. trust territory. Somali nationalists in Italian Somalia won assurances of independence in a decade. These assurances in turn inspired Somalis in the British protectorate to press for independence and unity with Italian Somalia. Finally, the two areas were granted independence, and on July 1, 1960, they merged to form the Somali Republic.

Independence brought not only unity but democracy. For the next nine years, the citizens of the new republic enjoyed a high level of political participation. Politics was seen as a realm open to every Somali, regardless of background. During this era of parliamentary democracy, clan and regional differences were worked out through frequent democratic elections involving many political parties.

The previous decades had been marked by a rise in Pan-Somalism, the belief that Somalia should be united with all Somali-occupied territories. In the post-independence years, preoccupation with Pan-Somalism led to a build-up of the Somali military and ultimately to war with Ethiopia and fighting in northern Kenya.

Somalia's leaders, many of whom had been educated in Italy and Britain, were initially well disposed to the West. Their desire to be nonaligned, however, led them to establish close ties with the Soviet Union and China. During the 1960s, the Soviet Union provided both military and economic aid, while China provided considerable development assistance. The United States provided development aid only. During that time, Ethiopia was the United States' principal ally in the region and a beneficiary of large-scale U.S. development and military aid. For as long as that alliance lasted, the United States remained reluctant to provide military assistance to Somalia.

The Revolutionary Regime

In October 1969, the army, under Major-General Mohammed Siyaad Barre, took over.

By the late 1960s, the government was perceived as inefficient and corrupt and was accused of improving relations with Ethiopia at the expense of its stated commitment to Pan-Somalism. In October 1969, one of the president's bodyguards, motivated by clan animosity, assassinated the president. A few days later, while politicians were busy with matters of succession, the army, under Major General Mohammed Siyaad Barre, took over. The new governing body, the Supreme Revolutionary Council (SRC), named Siyaad Barre president. Closely allied with the Soviet Union, the regime adopted as its creed "scientific socialism," based on three elements: community development through self reliance, a variant of socialism based on Marxist principles, and Islam. To develop the economy, the government launched a series of wasteful "crash programs" as well as well-conceived development projects in infrastructure, health, and education. The socialist regime sought to improve the status of minorities and women, and, after introducing a Somali writing system in 1972, launched a countrywide literacy campaign.

Most of these actions had popular support. However, there was growing opposition to the regime among Islamic scholars, in Somalia and abroad, as a result of the adoption of the Latin alphabet for the Somali script and the introduction of laws that were seen to be in conflict with Islamic law. The Islamic opposition was crushed by the military, and a number of Islamic leaders were executed.

Despite the new regime's popularity, it soon became clear that Somalia's experiment with democracy had ended. Shortly after taking over, Siyaad Barre abolished the National Assembly, sus-

pended the constitution, prohibited any form of political association, and put some prominent politicians and members of the previous government into custody. Later, under Soviet pressure, the regime created the Somali Revolutionary Socialist Party (SRSP), which replaced the SRC as the supreme authority in the country.

The Soviet Union, which already had a foothold in the army in the 1960s, became the dominant foreign influence in the 1970s. It armed, trained, and gave development assistance to Somalia. As Somalia became more pro-Soviet, its relations with the United States became strained, and in the early 1970s, the United States suspended aid to Somalia.

With the fall of the Emperor Haile Selassie in 1974, political dynamics in the region changed. Siyaad Barre continued to press the new military leaders in Ethiopia for control over the territory in the Somali-inhabited Ogaden Region. In 1977, Somalia invaded Ethiopia to support the Western Somali Liberation Front, a Somali guerrilla organization based in Ethiopia that sought to free the Ogaden and unite it with Somalia.

With the fall of Emperor Haile Selassie in 1974, political dynamics in the region changed.

Meanwhile, the Soviet Union and its allies (South Yemen, Libya, and Cuba) attempted unsuccessfully to mediate between Ethiopia and Somalia. The continued push of the Somali forces and their capture of most of the Ogaden forced the Soviet Union to choose sides; it cut off all arms to Somalia and provided Ethiopia with massive military assistance in the form of air power and Cuban and Yemeni troops. In November 1977, Siyaad Barre expelled the Soviets from Somalia. By the spring of 1978, as a result of the Soviet shift of support to Ethiopia, Somalia lost all the territory it had won.

Abandoned by the Soviets, Siyaad Barre turned toward the West.

Abandoned by the Soviets, Siyaad Barre turned toward the West. From 1978 onward, closer ties were created with Europe and the United States, as well as with Arab countries. Large amounts of foreign aid flowed in, some of it in the form of military equipment. The rift between Somalia and the Soviet Union and the new relationship between the Soviet Union and Ethiopia prompted Western countries to support Somalia economically and militarily.

The United States' decision to begin a military assistance program in Somalia was precipitated by the fall of the Shah of Iran, the United States' closest ally in the Gulf. In exchange for defensive military equipment, Somalia agreed to provide the United

States with access to Somali ports and airfields in Berbera, Mogadishu, and Kismaayo. In the last years of the Siyaad Barre government, the United States reduced its military and development aid programs as the regime became increasingly repressive and guilty of human rights violations.

Opposition to Siyaad Barre

During its early years, Siyaad Barre's regime enjoyed considerable popularity and a wide base of support. Even this era, however, had its share of power struggles among military and police officers in the SRC. In 1970, the vice president of the SRC was imprisoned, and in 1971, several prominent SRC members were executed. But the first effective opposition did not come until April 1978, after the army's humiliating defeat in the Ogaden, when some Majerteen clan officers organized an unsuccessful coup. Some of the coup organizers escaped to Ethiopia, where they organized the first opposition movement, which came to be known as the Somali Salvation Democratic Front (SSDF). The movement had a strong following in the central and northeastern regions and was supported by Ethiopia and Libya. The movement provided President Mengistu of Ethiopia with a golden opportunity to retaliate against Siyaad Barre for his support for the Western Somali Liberation movement, various Eritrean liberation fronts, the Oromo Liberation Front, and other opposition groups in Ethiopia.

Siyaad Barre exploited clan rivalries, pitting one clan against another, as a way to stay in power.

For opposing his regime, Siyaad Barre singled out the Majerteen clan, imprisoning some Majerteen military and civilian leaders and removing many others from their duties. Thus began a cycle of nepotism, as a government once based on broad clan support began to rely on a limited number of clans considered loyal. Loyalty to Siyaad Barre replaced job qualification as a criterion for government appointment. With less competent civil servants and military officers moving into positions of prominence, the quality of government deteriorated. This, in turn, resulted in widespread dissatisfaction. The problem was made worse by government involvement in economic activities, such as banking and commerce. Government corruption, together with nepotism, inefficiency, and a lack of accountability, resulted in gross inequities throughout the country.

Nomadic Somalis, whose culture is egalitarian, found the growing inequities in Somali society especially difficult to accept.

Dissidents from the Isaaq clans of northwestern Somalia formed the Somali National Movement (SNM) in London and soon found a home in Ethiopia from which they could launch guerrilla raids into Somalia. In 1989, Hawiye clans in central Somalia formed their own opposition movement, the United Somali Congress (USC). USC also established guerrilla bases in Ethiopia.

By the mid-1980s, government and opposition movements were clan based. As the influence of the opposition movements increased, the government retaliated with brutal reprisals against territories it believed were controlled by the opposition. The government missed several opportunities at reconciliation, and the society became polarized into clan groups.

In 1988, the SNM launched a successful guerrilla attack against government forces in Hargeisa and Burao in the north. The government forces were able to regain the two cities only by using great force, including aerial bombardments. High civilian casualties and the exodus of refugees to Ethiopia further alienated the north.

Nomadic Somalis, whose culture is egalitarian, found it especially difficult to accept the growing inequities in Somali society.

Under increasing pressure, the government attempted some reforms. The government re-introduced a multi-party system, adopted a new constitution, and called for elections. The opposition, however, did not trust the government and continued to fight both in the north and in the central regions. By the end of December 1990, the conflict had spread to the capital, Mogadishu. On January 27, 1991 Siyaad Barre's regime collapsed. Siyaad Barre fled Mogadishu and established a base in the southwestern region of Gedo. After twice failing to regain power, he left the country in early 1992.

Civil War

Hostilities did not end with the ouster of Siyaad Barre. Clan competition for power and the desire to settle old scores continued, with disastrous results for the civilian population. As soon as Siyaad Barre left Mogadishu, one faction of the USC, headed by Ali Mahdi Mohammed, formed an interim government without consulting other USC factions or other opposition or government-aligned groups. Angered by this unilateral action and responding to public pressure, the Somali National Movement held a two-month regional conference which resulted in declaring the North independent as the Somaliland Republic. In the South, the USC split into two warring factions, one led by interim President Ali

Mahdi Mohammed, the other led by the USC military wing leader, General Mohammed Farah Aideed. The Northeast, which had remained fairly uninvolved in these political events, largely maintained local peace and began restoring local government.

Mogadishu and much of southern and central Somalia slipped into anarchy. Over the course of the year, several hundred thousand Somalis died from violence, disease, and famine. At least 45% of the population was displaced internally or fled Somalia to neighboring countries, the Middle East, or the West. In August 1992, an estimated one fourth of Somalia's population, about 1.5 million people, was in danger of starvation. A study by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control showed that in the city of Baidoa, at least 40% of the population had died between August and November. Relief organizations estimated that by early 1993, one half of all Somali children under five years old had died.

In August 1992, an estimated one fourth of Somalia's population, about 1.5 million people, was in danger of starvation.

Hardest hit were the coastal communities of Mogadishu, Merka, Brava, and Kismaayo, the farming communities of the Shabeelle and Jubba valleys, and the interriverine areas of Baidoa, Buur Hakaba, Diinsoor, Xuddur, and Qansaxdheere. With the uprooting of the population in these areas, Somalia lost most of its commercial and farming communities.

Armed bandits, who looted warehouses and food shipments, greatly aggravated problems of food distribution. These bandits were under the authority of local warlords who filled the power vacuum created by the government's collapse. In addition to stealing food aid, they also looted public property left by the previous government and disrupted commercial activities. In the absence of an accepted government, power and food were in the hands of those with guns, and in a country that had been the recipient of much foreign military aid, there was no shortage of arms.

In the absence of an accepted government, power and food were in the hands of those with guns.

In August 1992, the United States began Operation Provide Relief, airlifting emergency supplies into Somalia from Mombasa, Kenya, in coordination with the Disaster Assistance Response Team at the U.S. Agency for International Development. This was followed in December 1992 by the U.S.-led Operation Restore Hope, which reduced the level of violence and facilitated the delivery of humanitarian assistance. On May 1, 1993, the United Nations took over command from the United States. Operation Restore Hope and subsequent actions by the United States and the United Nations have stabilized the situation in the south. Starva-

tion has all but ended, agricultural production has partly recovered, and hostilities have decreased. The exception is Mogadishu, where the warlord General Mohammed Farah Aideed continues to wage a guerrilla campaign against the United Nations. Most warlords, including Aideed, feel they will lose power in a society in which the advantage of military force is eliminated.

Social Structure and Gender Roles

Somalis belong to clans and sub-clans. These hierarchical descent groups, each said to originate with a single male ancestor, are a central fact of Somali life. Understanding how Somali people relate to one another requires some knowledge of the clan system.

In Somali society, clans serve as a source of great solidarity as well as conflict.

In Somali society, clans serve as a source of great solidarity as well as conflict. Clans combine forces for protection, access to water and good land, and political power. The Somali clan organization is an unstable system, characterized by changing alliances and temporary coalitions. The ever-shifting world of clan politics is captured in a saying popular among nomads: My full brother and I against my father, my father's household against my uncle's household, our two households (my uncle's and mine) against the rest of the immediate kin, the immediate kin against non-immediate members of my clan, my clan against other clans, and my nation and I against the world.

Among Somalis, a primary division exists between the *Samaale* and the *Sab*. The Samaale are the majority of the Somali people and consist of four main clan families—the Dir, Isaaq, Hawiye, and Daarood—each of which is further divided into sub-clans. The Samaale are primarily of nomadic origin and live throughout Somalia and in Ethiopia, Kenya, and Djibouti. The Sab consist of two clan families, the Digil and Raxanweyn, located primarily in southern Somalia, where they mix farming and herding and are more likely than the Samaale to be sedentary.

The society of the pastoral Somalis is fundamentally democratic. Traditionally, decisions are made by councils of men. These councils are egalitarian, sometimes to the point of anarchy, although age, lineage seniority, and wealth can have influence. In these councils, anthropologist I. M. Lewis points out, "all men are councilors and all men politicians." Somali egalitarianism permeates all aspects of society. In Somalia, it is not at all unusual for a poor and uneducated nomad to approach a high government offi-

cial as an equal and engage him in a discussion about the affairs of state.

A fundamental aspect of traditional Somali political organization is the *diya*-paying group. *Diya* is compensation paid by a person who has injured or killed another person. A *diya*-paying group is made up of between a few hundred to a few thousand men linked by lineage and a contractual agreement to support one another, especially in regard to compensation for injuries and death against fellow members.

While Somalia's political culture is basically egalitarian, social and political change have created new patterns of social life. In recent years, a new urban group, educated in Western-type schools and working as merchants or in government, has emerged. These urbanites enjoy more wealth, better access to government services, and greater educational opportunities for their children than do other sectors of society.

While Somalia's political culture is basically egalitarian, social and political change have created new patterns of social life.

For Somalis who are settled or partly settled farmers, the village and its headman assume social and political importance. In rural areas, links to the cities remain strong, with rural relatives caring for livestock owned by the urbanites.

For all Somalis, the family is the ultimate source of personal security and identity. The importance of family is reflected in the common Somali question, *tol maa tahay?* (What is your lineage?). Historian Charles Geshekter notes, "When Somalis meet each other they don't ask: Where are you from? Rather, they ask: *Whom* are you from? Genealogy is to Somalis what an address is to Americans."

Somali women have more freedom to become educated, to work, and to travel than do most other Muslim women.

Somalis typically live in nuclear families, although older parents may move in with one of their children. Households are usually monogamous; in polygamous households (one fifth of all families), wives usually have their own residences and are responsible for different economic activities. Traditionally, marriages were arranged, since marriage was seen as a way to cement alliances. Increasingly, however, parents are willing to consider love interests if they think the match is suitable.

Somali culture is male centered, at least in public, although women play important economic roles in both farming and herding families and in business in the cities. Female labor is valued for productive tasks as well as for household chores, as long as the male is still seen as being in charge. In recent years, war, drought,

and male migration have dramatically increased the number of female-headed households.

As the result of efforts by the socialist regime to improve opportunities for women, Somali women have more freedom to become educated, to work, and to travel than do most other Muslim women. Before the 1969 revolution, 20% of primary school students were girls; in 1979, the figure approached 40%.

In other ways, the status of women remains unchanged. Women are still expected to keep the family's honor by remaining virgins until marriage. It is said that female circumcision and infibulation,* performed on 98% of Somali girls between the ages of 8 and 10, represent an effort to control women's sexuality, since the practice is not required by Islam. Many women suffer all of their lives from a great variety of medical problems stemming from this practice.

Somali had no written form until 1972, when a Somali script, based on the Roman alphabet, was adopted.

Language and Literacy

Somalis speak Somali. Many people also speak Arabic, and educated Somalis usually speak either English or Italian as well. Swahili may also be spoken in coastal areas near Kenya.

Somali is a member of a group of languages called lowland Eastern Cushitic. Eastern Cushitic, spoken by people living in Ethiopia, Eritrea, Somalia, Djibouti, Kenya, and Sudan, belongs to the Cushitic language family, which in turn is part of the Afro-Asiatic stock.

Somali has two major dialects: the standard dialect, spoken by most Somalis, and the Digil/Raxanweyn dialect, spoken primarily in the interriverine areas of the south. Although the Digil/Raxanweyn dialect in the south is almost as different from standard Somali as French is from Italian, most Digil/Raxanweyn speakers are familiar with standard Somali. Thus, language provides a channel of communication for people thousands of miles apart.

Somali has adopted many Arabic words, both modern phrases to deal with modern institutions, such as government and finance, and older Arabic terms to discuss international trade and religion. Somali also contains old Qahtani words common to Cushitic and Semitic languages.

*Female circumcision, as practiced in Somalia, involves the removal of the clitoris and the labia. With infibulation, the vagina is then sewn up, leaving only a tiny opening, which is enlarged for marriage and enlarged once again for childbirth.

Somali had no written form until 1972, when a Somali script, based on the Roman alphabet, was adopted. Until that time, English and Italian served as the languages of government and education. This served to create an elite, since only a small proportion of Somali society who knew these colonial languages had access to government positions or the few managerial or technical jobs in private enterprise. The 1972 decision to introduce a Somali script fundamentally changed the situation. Somali officials were required to learn the script, and a countrywide literacy campaign was launched. Great progress was made in the development of national literacy, particularly in the rural areas, where previous literacy campaigns had failed. In 1975, government figures indicated a literacy rate of 55%, in contrast to a 5% rate before the adoption of the national script. Even if the government estimate is exaggerated—a 1990 U.N. estimate put the national literacy rate at 24%—Somali progress in literacy has clearly been significant.

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Education

Before the colonial era, Koranic schools provided traditional Islamic education. Upon completion of the Koran, students were introduced to theology, Arabic grammar, literature, and *sharia* (Islamic law). After this, they might study under separate scholars, each having strength in a particular discipline. For this reason, students often had to travel long distances. The most important centers of learning were Seylac, Harar, Mogadishu, Marka, Brava, and Baardheere.

The colonial era introduced Western-style education. The two colonial powers—British in the north and Italian in the south—pursued different educational policies. The Italian-run schools provided technical training in agriculture, commerce, maritime studies, and aviation, while the British schools trained young men for administrative and technical positions.

Educational opportunities expanded after the Somali script was introduced in the 1970s as a medium of instruction at the primary, intermediate, and secondary levels. Basic education became compulsory. Secondary education, however, remained beyond the grasp of most Somalis. In the late 1980s, the number of students in secondary school was less than 10% of the total in primary schools. In recent years, an Islamic resurgence has led to a revival of Islamic education in both urban and rural areas.

Technical schools offered training in agriculture, communication, crafts, and other fields. In addition to formal technical education, apprenticeships in trades such as blacksmithing, carpentry, farming, fishing, and pastoralism passed skills from parents to children.

Somalia's principal institution of higher learning, the Somali National University, was founded in 1970, with nine faculties. It later expanded to 13. Before the outbreak of civil war, the university had 4,000 students.

Two years of civil war destroyed most of Somalia's educational institutions, and many of the educated elite left the country. There are now attempts to restart education in clan enclaves.

Two years of civil war destroyed most of Somalia's educational institutions.

Knowledge of English

Before independence in 1960, English and Italian served as the languages of administration and instruction in Somalia's schools, while Arabic was used for unofficial transactions or personal correspondence.

After the Somali script was adopted in 1972, Somali became the language of government and education. As a result, young people today have very little exposure to English or Italian until they go to college. Those who are middle aged and educated, however, often have some proficiency in English, Italian, Arabic, or Russian. In the last few years, private English classes have flourished in Somalia.

Values

Many Somali values are similar to American ones. Somalis believe strongly in independence, democracy, egalitarianism, and individualism. Like Americans, Somalis value generosity. Unlike Americans, however, Somalis generally do not express their appreciation verbally.

Somalis respect strength and often challenge others to test their limits. Somali justice is based on the notion of "an eye for an eye." Somalis are a proud people—excessively so, some would say—and their boasting can stretch the truth more than a little. Saving face is very important to them, so indirectness and humor are often used in conversation. Somalis are also able to see the humor in a situation and to laugh at themselves. While Somalis can be opinionated, they are generally willing to reconsider their views if they are presented with adequate evidence. Somalis have

a long history of going abroad to work or to study and are known for their ability to adjust to new situations.

Somalis deeply value the family. The strength of family ties provides a safety net in times of need, and the protection of family honor is important. Loyalty is an important value and can extend beyond family and clan. Somalis value their friendships; once a Somali becomes a friend, he is usually one for life.

Religion

Most Somalis are Sunni Muslims. Islam is the principal faith and is vitally important to the Somali sense of national identity, although traces of pre-Islamic traditional religions exist in Somali folk spirituality.

Islam is the principal faith and is vitally important to the Somali sense of national identity.

Among Somalis, there is a strong tradition of *tariqa*, religious orders associated with Sufism, a mystical current in Islam. Tariqas are social and religious brotherhoods that serve as centers of learning and religious leadership. Leaders of tariqas are said to have *baraka*, a state of blessedness, suggesting a spiritual power that may be invoked at the tomb of a leader.

In recent years, Islamic fundamentalism has gained support, with Somalis seeking comfort in a faith that offers an explanation for their national disaster. According to traditional Islamic belief, social turmoil is God's punishment for straying from the correct path; the way to regain God's favor is to repent collectively and redirect society to Islamic precepts. Thus, fundamentalism has served as a rallying point for Somalis exhausted from the factionalism and anarchy that has destroyed their country; it attracts Somalis who are intellectually adrift and seek the reassurance of a rigid code of conduct.

The fundamentalists view tariqas as superstitious and oppose their reverence for saints. They oppose secular government and advocate the introduction of *sharia* law and strict Islamic dress for women. Traditional religious men, clan leaders, and elders, however, still have a larger following than the fundamentalists, although the influence of the latter is on the rise.

Art, Poetry, and Song

In a nomadic culture, where one's possessions are frequently moved, there is little reason for the plastic arts to be highly developed. Somalis embellish and decorate their woven and wooden milk jugs and their wooden headrests, and traditional

dance is important, though mainly as a form of courtship among young people. But the epitome of Somali artistry is oral.

Facility with speech is highly valued in Somali society, where one's abilities as a political or religious leader, a warrior or a suitor, depend, in part, on one's way with words. Since pride is important in Somali society, the ability to use language to save face is essential. Humor, based on puns and word play, is used to blunt criticism and to extricate oneself from embarrassing situations. This use of humor is captured in a Somali proverb: "A man with a sense of humor is never at a loss for words or action."

It is in the art of oral poetry and song that Somalis excel. Whether used as a challenge, a courting technique, or political rhetoric, poetry and song remain a vital part of Somali culture, enhanced rather than diminished by radio broadcasting. Poetry recitations are often accompanied by the chewing of *qat*,* a mild stimulant, which many Somalis believe helps one to think and talk better. One indication of the slowly changing public role of Somali women is their increasing use of poetry as a means of public expression.

Facility with speech is highly valued in Somali society, where one's abilities as a political or religious leader, a warrior or a suitor, depend, in part, on one's way with words.

Camels, the basis of life for traditional Somali herders, frequently figure in poetic expression. A young man compares his tender feelings for his beloved to a camel's feelings for her young: "I am afflicted with the trauma of frustrated love as a camel whose baby has been unjustly separated from her," and a mother warns her daughter to be faithful in marriage by saying, "Only camels enjoy being milked by two men at the same time. Anything else of the female kind shared by two men soon loses its luster."

Food and Dress

In Somalia, location and livelihood influence diet, but on the whole, the Somali diet is low in caloric intake and high in protein consumption.

Milk, ghee (liquid butter), and meat, supplemented by wild berries and fruits, provide nomadic pastoralists with about half of their traditional diet. Other foods such as sorghum, corn, rice, tea, sugar, dates, condiments, and occasional vegetables are purchased or traded for livestock and livestock products.

Despite Somalia's long coastline, fish consumption tradition-

*Recent media accounts give the impression that qat (spelled *qaad* in Somali) is far more potent than it is. Scientists compare the stimulation of qat to that of several cups of strong coffee.

ally has been limited to coastal towns, although in recent years more fish is being consumed in the interior. Traditional society holds fishermen and the eating of fish in low regard. Nomads, in particular, disdain fish consumption: To eat fish is to show that one is not a good herdsman.

Farmers enjoy slightly more variety in their diet, consuming more cereals (often *soor*, a sorghum porridge, or *canjeero*, a flat unrisen bread), grain legumes, and vegetables than do the nomads. Farmers in the riverine areas consume more fruit, especially bananas and citrus, and vegetables. Among the Raxanweyn, coffee beans cooked in ghee are considered a delicacy. The coastal cities and towns, influenced by the Arabian peninsula, offer a greater variety of dishes. The Italian influence is also seen in the large amount of spaghetti, known as *baasto*, consumed by Somalis.

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As Muslims, Somalis are forbidden to eat pork or lard or to drink alcohol. Somalis in urban areas may drink alcohol, but most still do not touch pork. All meat must be slaughtered in a special way so that it is *xalaal*—clean and pure. In the United States, kosher foods meet Muslim dietary requirements.

Shaped by the country's location as an international trade route, Somali attire is quite diverse. At work or school, in a modern setting or away from their homeland, most Somalis wear Western dress in public. But for leisure or in rural areas, traditional dress prevails. Men wear two lengths of white cotton wrapped around them as a skirt and shawl or they wear a *macaawiis*, a brightly colored cloth, similar to an Indonesian sarong. With this they may wear a Western shirt or shawl and cover their heads with *benadiry kufia*, a Somali cap.

Married women wear head scarves, but usually do not veil, with the exception of more fundamentalist women and women from old conservative Arab families.

Women's dress is even more diverse. Except for schoolgirls, who wear trousers and shirts, Somali women usually wear full-length dresses. These come in a variety of styles. The traditional Somali *guntiino* is similar to an Indian sari but made of simple white or red cotton, although the well-to-do often wear more elaborate versions. In cities and in the rural areas of the north and northeast, women wear thin cotton or polyester voile dresses over a full length half slip and a brassiere. Married women wear head scarves, but usually do not veil, with the exception of more fundamentalist women and women from old conservative Arab families. Traditionally, married and unmarried women could be told apart, not only because of the scarves, but also because single girls braided their hair and did not wear makeup or perfumes or

use incense in their hair. Urbanization, however, is eroding this distinction. Minor regional variations in women's clothing are also disappearing.

Among women, hand and foot painting, using *henna* and *khidaab* dyes, is popular. The artist is generally a woman who uses the plant-based dyes to apply elaborately stylized paintings that cover the foot up to the ankle or the hand up to the wrist. Its application often signifies happy occasions, such as a marriage or the birth of a baby.

Festivities

Festivities in Somalia are associated with religious, social, or seasonal events. At the end of Ramadan, the Islamic month of fasting, Muslims celebrate the *Id-al-Fitir* for three days. During this time, people dress in new clothes and spend their time praying and exchanging presents. Another religious festival, the *Id-al-Adha*, comes three months later and coincides with the *Haj*, or pilgrimage to Mecca, which all devout Muslims must make if they are able. The celebration is similar to the *Id-al-Fitir*.

In the rainy season, when grazing and water are abundant, young nomadic boys and girls perform traditional dances out in the open and often at night.

Social occasions such as engagement, marriage, the circumcision of boys on the seventh day after birth, and the remembrance of saints are rooted in both culture and religion. In the rainy season, when grazing and water are abundant, young nomadic boys and girls perform traditional dances out in the open and often at night. Separate dances are also held for seven consecutive days after marriage.

The festival of fire falls on July 27 or 28 and marks the beginning of the Somali solar year. Although Somalis, like all Muslims, follow the lunar year, they use the solar year for the timing of crop production and livestock husbandry. At the festival of fire, people build bonfires, splash water, and, in some communities perform stick fights and dances. This festival, called *Neeroosh* or *Dab-shid*, is probably a remnant of fire and sun worship dating back to Persian influences. Another popular festival is the *Robdoon*. Among the Raxanweyn, religious leaders read from Islamic texts, sprinkle holy water, and call for rain while young people may dance.

Names

Somalis do not have surnames in the Western sense. To identify a Somali, three names must be used: a given name followed by the father's given name and the grandfather's. (Women, therefore, do not change their names at marriage.) Unlike English—which has mostly separate pools for given and family names—Somalis have one pool for all three names. As a result, many names are similar.

Perhaps for this reason, nearly all men and some women are identified by a public name, *naanays*. There are two kinds of naanays: overt nicknames, similar to Western nicknames, and covert nicknames, which are used to talk about a person but rarely used to address that person. Examples of overt nicknames are *Raage* (he who delayed at birth), *Madoowbe* (very black), and, for someone who has lived abroad, *Gaal* (foreigner). Examples of covert nicknames are *Laba sacle* (the man with only two cows) and *Wiil Waal* (crazy boy). Famous people are sometimes referred to as "son or daughter of —". Thus the Sayyid (see page 6) is frequently called Ina Cabdille Xasan (son of Cabdille Xasan).

Most names have meaning, and certain names are given to denote time of birth, physical characteristics, birth order, and so on.

Traditionally, parents chose their children's names in consultation with religious leaders, astrologers, and older wise family members. In recent years, however, it is more common to simply name children after a relative or a family friend. Two exceptions to this tendency are first children, commonly named Faduma or Mohammed, and male twins, commonly named Hassan and Hussein.

The origin of Somali names is often Cushitic or Arabic, with the latter more common. Most names have meaning, and certain names are given to denote time of birth, physical characteristics, birth order, and so on. Some examples of names, their origins, approximate meanings, and possible reasons for being given are listed below. The first ten names are for girls (Awa to Ubah) and are of Cushitic origin. The next ten names are for boys (Awaale to Geeddi) and are also Cushitic. The next twenty names, ten for girls first (Faadumo to Fawzia) and then ten for boys (Mohammed to Adam), are of Arabic origin.

Cushitic Names

Girl's Name	*Meaning*	*Reason*
Awa (Cawo)	Lucky	Optimistic
Awrala (Cawralo)	Without blemish	Praise
Hodan	Well to do	Praise
Ambro (Cambro)	Of amber	Praise
Alaso (Calaso)	Smooth/fair skinned	Praise
Adey (Cadey)	Fair skinned	Praise
Haweeya	The elevated one	Praise
Sagal	Morning star	Praise
Magol	Early flowering	Praise
Ubah (Ubax)	Flower	Praise

Boy's Name	*Meaning*	*Reason*
Awaale	Lucky	Praise
Waabberi	Sunrise	Born in early morning
Arale (Caraale)	Clean	Praise
Bahdoon	The one who looks for his clan	Born away from home
Abtidoon	Looking for uncle's mother's family	Born away from home
Samatar	Doer of good	Praise
Samakab	Supporter of right	Praise
Gutaale	Leader of armies	Praise
Guleed	The victorious	Praise
Geeddi	The traveler	Born during transhumance

Arabic Names

Girl's Name	*Meaning*	*Reason*
Faadumo	Weaned early	Daughter of the Prophet, usually for the first daughter
Aasha	Long living	After the wife of the Prophet
Leyla	Night	Long dark hair/praise
Mariam	—	Mother of Jesus (Mary); also a section in the Koran
Fathia	Opener of fortune	Praise
Sahra	Flower	Praise
Basra	The town of Basra	Associated with sweetness of dates
Maka	The town of Mecca	Religious
Sufia	Pure	Praise
Fawzia	Successful	Praise

Boy's Name	*Meaning*	*Reason*
Mohammed (Maxammed)	One who is worthy of thanks	After the Prophet
Abukar	Father of Bukar	After the 1st Khalif (the secular and religious head of a Moslem state)
Omar	Long living	After the 2nd Khalif
Othman	—	After the 3rd Khalif
Ali	The high	After the 4th Khalif
Hassan/Hussein	Handsome	After the grandchildren of the Prophet—name given to twins
Khalid	Lasting	After an Islamic military leader
Abdullah	Slave of God	Father of the Prophet
Adam	Father of humanity	After the first man

The Somali Language

The Sound System and Pronunciation

Somali uses all but three letters *(p, v,* and *z)* of the English alphabet. Of the thirty-three sounds, fifteen *(b, d, f, g, h, j, k, l, m, n, s, sh, t, w,* and *y)* are very much like their English counterparts.

Somali has seven consonants *(c, dh, kh, q, r, x* and ' [glottal stop]) that do not match anything in English. The English sounds most likely to present difficulties for Somalis are those represented by the letters *c, q, r,* and *x,* since these letters are pronounced quite differently in Somali. For pronunciation of Somali letters, see p. 29.

In Somali, the consonants *b, d, dh, g, l, m, n,* and *r* can be doubled to indicate a sound which is pronounced with much more force than its single counterpart. Thus, Somalis often pronounce the doubled consonants in English words such as "bigger," "middle," "merry," "simmer," and "nibble" with more strength than they would be pronounced by a native speaker of English.

The English sounds most likely to present difficulties for Somalis are those represented by the letters **c, q, r,** *and* **x,** *since these letters are pronounced quite differently in Somali.*

Vowels always have fixed value in Somali; each letter has one sound and each sound has one letter.

a	tart	*aa*	father
ay	high, pie	*ey*	say
e	way [but shorter]	*ee*	payday
i	in, wit	*ii*	see
o	boat	*oo*	sew [but drawn a little bit longer]
u	coo	*uu*	noon [but drawn a little bit longer]

Long vowels *(aa, ee, ii, oo, uu)* are used in Somali and pronounced about twice as long as a single counterpart.

English vowels will present some difficulty to Somalis, since English lacks Somali's one-to-one correspondence between vowel letters and sounds; in English, each letter has more than one sound, and each sound has more than one spelling. Typically, Somalis will pronounce English words the way they would pronounce them in Somali. Thus, *boat* might be pronounced "bow-at" with two syllables, and the word *may* might be pronounced "my."

Somalis may draw out English double vowels, as in *noon* or

been, giving them the long sound that doubled vowel letters represent in Somali.

Tone occurs in Somali, but it is not as complex as in Chinese, in which every word has a special tone pattern. In Somali, tone rarely marks a difference in word meaning. This aspect of Somali is not likely to create a problem for Somalis learning English.

The Grammatical System

- **Articles**

Somali and English are quite different when it comes to *the* and *a*. The definite article in Somali has gender suffixes; like French, the Somali definite article has a masculine and feminine form.

Somalis can have difficulty mastering the English indefinite article *(a/an)* because their own language has no equivalent. In Somali, the concept of indefiniteness is expressed by the noun alone.

- **Nouns**

Somali nouns are more highly inflected than are nouns in English. In English, nouns are inflected only for number — that is, they have different forms for singular and plural. In Somali, not only does each noun have number, with eight kinds of plural forms; a noun is also inflected for gender (masculine or feminine) and case (nominative, genitive, absolutive, and vocative).

In Somali, differences in gender, number, or case are marked by grammatical tone:

ínan	'boy'	inán	'girl'	[gender]
díbi	'ox'	dibí	'oxen'	[number]
Múuse	'Moses'	Mùuse	'Hey, Moses'	[vocative case]

The system of case marking is so different between the two languages that mistakes are unavoidable.

The system of case marking is so different between the two languages that mistakes are unavoidable. Typically, a Somali will drop the apostrophe-*s* possessive in favor of a tone change, e.g., "Mary book", with a rising intonation on the first syllable of "Mary".

- **Adjectives**

In Somali, most adjectives are formed by adding *-an* or *-san* to a verb or noun. Thus, *gaab* 'shortness' becomes *gaaban* 'short', and *quruх* 'beauty' becomes *quruxsan* 'beautiful'. Somalis may coin some interesting English adjectives by a similar process.

Somali adjectives often occur with a short form of the verb *to*

be suffixed to them. For example, *yar* 'small' becomes *yaraa* 'he was small'. As a result, Somali speakers of English tend to add *aa* to adjectives. Thus, instead of saying "small", they might say something that sounds like "small-ah". This may cause confusion, particularly among British speakers of English, who may think the speaker is saying "small*er*".

- **Prepositions**

English prepositions can cause great difficulty for Somalis. Whereas English has a great variety of prepositions, Somali has only four, and they come before the verb rather than before the noun. Because they are so few, Somali prepositions have a wide range of meanings:

English prepositions can cause great difficulty for Somalis.

ka 'from, away from, out of' and 'about, concerning'
ku 'in, into, on, at' and 'with, by means of, using'
la 'with, together with, in the company of'
u 'to, towards' and 'for, on behalf of'

For example:

Isaga u sheeg.	Tell it to him.
Isaga ka sheeg.	Tell about him.
Isaga ku sheeg.	Call him (a name).
Qori ka samee!	Make it of wood!
Guriga ku samee!	Do it at home!
Isaga la samee!	Do it with him!

- **Verbs**

Verbs usually come last in Somali sentences.

Verbs usually come last in Somali sentences. As a result, Somali speakers of English may tend to put the verb at the end of a sentence.

Somali lacks a passive voice. Instead of the passive, Somali uses the indefinite pronoun *la* 'someone', as in *Goormaa la dhisey?* "When was it built?" (literally, "When someone built?"). Using English passives correctly can be a major challenge for Somali students of English.

Somali has a present habitual and a present progressive tense, but they are not used in the same contexts in which these tenses are used in English. Somali uses the present progressive tense where the simple present tense would be used in English, and this feature of Somali may carry over into the English speech of Somalis. Somali speakers of English often make use of the present

progressive tense ("I am going to work every day") where English speakers would use the simple present ("I go to work every day").

The Importance of Proverbs

Somali has a rich tradition of proverbs, passed on from previous generations and embellished by individual speakers. Proverbs play a very important role in everyday speech.

Aqoon la'aani waa iftiin la'aan.

Being without knowledge is to be without light.

Ilko wada jir bey wax ku gooyaan.

Unity is power. (literally, "Together the teeth can cut.")

Intaadan falin ka fiirso.

Look before you leap. (literally, "Think before you do.")

Nabar doogi ma haro.

An old wound will not go away.

Proverbs play a very important role in everyday speech.

This is one area where Somalis find English impoverished. Some will go to great effort to learn English sayings and use them far too frequently; others may translate literally from the Somali and hope for the best.

The Writing System

Somali has had a written form only since 1972. Because only a small segment of Somali society—young adults who studied Somali spelling in school—has thoroughly mastered Somali orthography, spelling mistakes are frequent.

Spelling errors occur frequently in the Somali press and in government reports. Most errors involve using single, rather than doubled, vowels or consonants.

Some Basic Somali Expressions

Ma nabad baa?	Hello. [literally, "Is it peace?" — standard greeting]
Waa nabad.	Hello. [literally, "It is peace." — in response]
Subax wanaagsan.	Good morning.
Maalin wanaagsan.	Good day.
Galab wanaagsan.	Good afternoon.
Habeen wanaagsan.	Good evening.
Iska warran?	How are you? [literally, "Tell about yourself."]
Magacaa?	What is your name?
Yuusuf baa la i yiraahdaa.	My name is Joseph.

Some Basic Somali Vocabulary

airplane	*dayuurad*	meat	*hilib*
automobile	*baabuur*	medicine	*daawo*
cold	*qabow*	milk	*caano*
danger	*khatar, halis*	month	*bil*
daughter [also: girl]	*gabar, inan*	mother	*hooyo*
day	*maalin*	road, street	*waddo*
drink	*cab*	ship	*markab*
eat	*cun*	son [also: boy]	*wiil, inan*
father	*aabbe*	vegetables	*khudaar*
food	*cunto*	water	*biyo*
friend	*saaxiib*	when?	*goorma?*
fruit	*miro*	where?	*xaggee?*
fuel	*shidaal*	why?	*maxaa?*
hot	*kulul*		

The Somali Sounds

a	heart
aa	father
ay	high, pie
b	boy
c	* [a low growling sound]
d	dad
dh	* [as in donkey, but pronounced further back in the mouth]
e	say
ee	payday
f	fish
g	gag
h	hook
i	in, wit
ii	see
j	jack
k	skid, kick [not with the aspiration of kill]
kh	* [a gutteral sound as in Arabic]
l	little
m	man
n	no
o	boat
oo	sow, sew [but drawn out a bit longer]
q	* [as in cool, although further back in the mouth]
r	* [like the Scottish 'r']
s	see
sh	she
t	start [not with the aspiration of ton or tent]
u	coo
uu	noon [but drawn out a bit longer]
w	way
x	* [like German Bach; somewhat like bringing up phlegm to spit]
y	yes
'	* [uh-uh glottal stop] (as in some American dialect pronunciations of "sentence" [se'ns] or British "little" [li'l])

Glossary

Aqal	Portable, dome-shaped dwelling of nomads
Aroos	Wedding
Canjeero	Flat, unrisen bread, similar to a pancake
Cariish	Rectangular house
Bakaar	Underground pit used to store grain
Barre, Mohammed Siyaad	President of Somalia, 1969–1991
Beeraley	Farmers
Clan family	A group of different clans with a sense of identity when engaged in conflict against other clan families. *Example:* Daarood
Clan	Upper limit of political action. Has territorial properties and often a clan head or sultan. *Example:* Dhulbahante
Daaqsin	Grazing areas
Dambiil	A handwoven bag
Dervish	Known as *Daraawiish* in Somali. Followers of Sayyid Mohammed Abdullah Hassan, an anti-colonial religious leader (1856-1920)
Derin/dermo	A handwoven mat
Dhobeey	Crop production areas with heavy soil
Diya-paying group	A group of men linked by lineage and a contractual agreement to support one another, especially in regard to compensation for injuries and death against fellow members
Faqash	Derogatory word for supporters of ex-President Mohammed Siyaad Barre
Gaal	Originally the Oromo, now used when referring to any non-Moslems
Geel	Camel(s) [generic]
Ghee	Liquefied butter
Good weather	In Somalia, "good weather" means it is raining.

Greater Somalia	Present Somalia plus the Somali-inhabited areas of Eritrea, Kenya, the Republic of Djibouti, and the Ogaden region of Ethiopia. Somalis have spent a considerable amount of energy fighting their neighbors to attain this goal. The collapse of the Somali state may be partially attributed to this unrealized goal
Istun	Stick fighting at the start of the solar calendar
Masjid	Mosque or house of worship for Moslems
Macaawiis	Man's sarong or long wrap skirt
Mooryaan	Out-of-control armed militias, often from nomadic backgrounds
Muddul	A round conical dwelling used by farmers
Odkac/Muqmad	Lean, finely cut and fried meat, often kept in oil or melted butter, which lasts for a long time
Primary lineage	Within a clan, an individual identifies most closely with his/her primary lineage where descent is patrilineal. Marriage is usually outside the lineage.
Ramadan	The month of fasting for Moslems
Sar	Urban cement buildings
Soor	Porridge, often made out of sorghum, a mainstay of the diet for southern farmers
Warlords	Leaders of different militias that control portions of the country
Xaaraan	Ritually unclean, forbidden for Moslems
Xalaal	Clean or ritually pure for Moslems, including the correct slaughter of animals for food. The opposite of Haraam
Xeeb	Coastal area
Xool Raacato	Nomadic herders
Yarad	Dowry paid to the family of the bride

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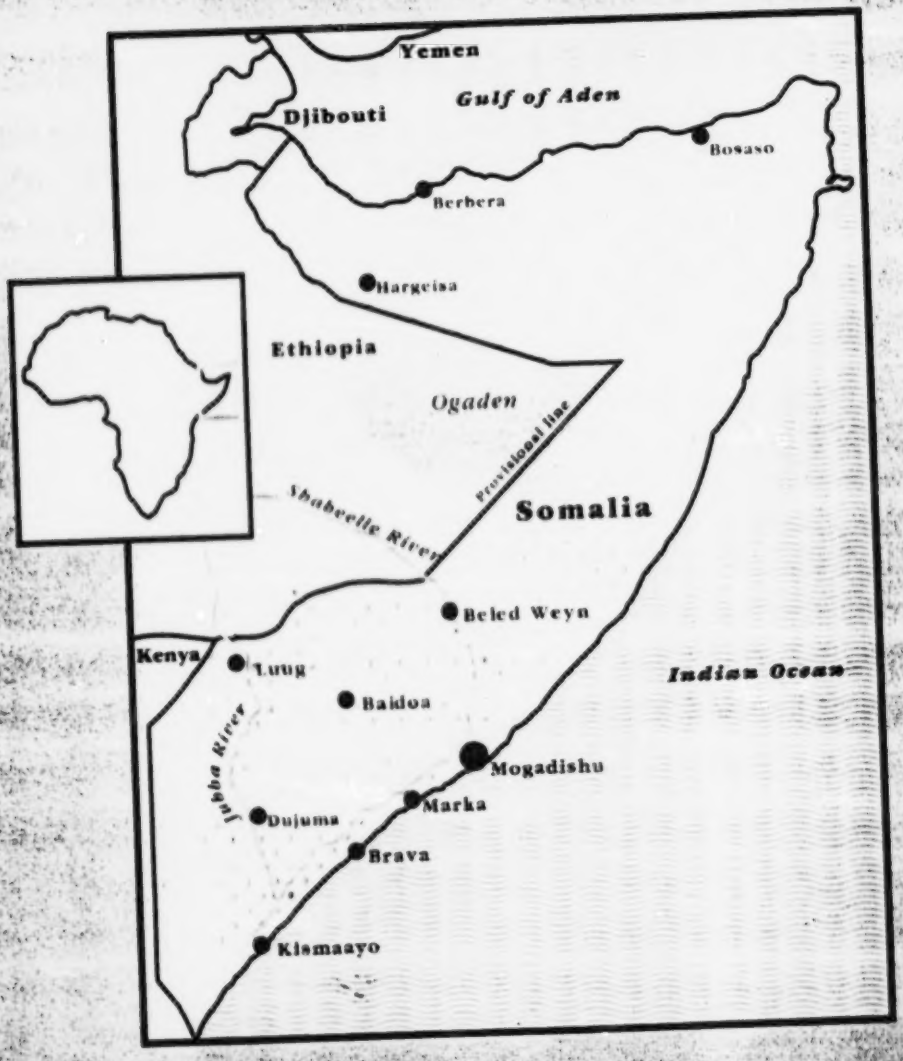

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